



# Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 108<sup>th</sup> CONGRESS, FIRST SESSION

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## *House of Representatives* **JUSTICE AND EQUITY FOR MEMBERS OF THE UNITED STATES MERCHANT MARINE!**

**HON. BOB FILNER**  
**OF CALIFORNIA**  
IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

**MR. FILNER:** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to ask the Congress to correct an injustice that has been inflicted upon a group of World War II veterans, the World War II United States Merchant Mariners.

World War II Merchant Mariners suffered the highest casualty rate of any of the branches of service while they delivered troops, tanks, food, airplanes, fuel and other needed supplies to every theater of the war. Compared to the large number of men and women serving in World War II, the numbers of Merchant Mariners were small, but their chance of dying during service was extremely high. Enemy forces sank over 800 ships between 1941 and 1944 alone.

Unfortunately, this group of brave men were denied their rights under the GI Bill of Rights which Congress enacted in 1945. All those who served in the Army, Navy,

Marine Corps, Air Force or Coast Guard were recipients of benefits under the GI Bill. The United States Merchant Marine was not included.

Mr. Speaker, the Merchant Marine became the forgotten service. For four decades, no effort was made to recognize the contribution made by this branch of the Armed Forces. The fact that merchant seamen had borne arms during wartime in the defense of their country did not seem to matter.

No legislation to benefit merchant seamen was passed by Congress until 1988 when the Seaman Acts of 1988 finally granted them the status of veteran and a “watered down” GI Bill of Rights. Some portions of the GI Bill have never been made available to veterans of the Merchant Marine.

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While it is impossible to make up for over 40 years of unpaid benefits, I propose a bill that will acknowledge the service of the veterans of the Merchant Marine and offer compensation for years and years of lost benefits. My bill, H.R. 3729, the Belated Thank You to the Merchant Mariners of World War II Act of 2004, would pay each eligible veteran a monthly benefit of \$1,000. That payment would also go to their surviving spouse.

The average age of Merchant Marine veterans is now 81. Many have outlived their savings. A monthly benefit to compensate for the loss of nearly a lifetime of ineligibility for the GI Bill would be of comfort and would provide some measure of security for veterans of the Merchant Marine.

I owe a debt of gratitude to Ian Allison, Merchant Marine combat veteran, Co-Chairman of the Just Compensation Committee, for bringing to me the plight of the Merchant Mariners. To recognize Mr. Allison, his Co-Chairman, Henry Van Gemert, and the thousands of veterans of the United States Merchant Marine, I introduce the Belated Thank You to the Merchant Mariners of World War II Act of 2004, today, January 27, 2004, the date of Mr. Allison's 84th birthday.

I urge my colleagues to join me in cosponsoring this legislation. We can never make up for the years lost, but we can fix the injustice by passing H.R. 3729 as quickly as possible.